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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CARACAS 002682

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/18/2016

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SUBJECT: SNAPSHOT OF VENEZUELAN MILITARY OFFICIALS IN
CIVILIAN POSTS

REF: A. CARACAS 1635

[1](#)B. 2005 CARACAS 2941

[1](#)C. 2005 CARACAS 219

CARACAS 00002682 001.3 OF 003

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT R. DOWNES FOR 1.4 (D)

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) President Chavez continues to stack Venezuelan civil society with military loyalists, and a uniformed presence extends from ministries to national banks to local government. Chavez' BRV is at a profound level a militaristic regime, characterized by a strict hierarchy. The pervasive presence of military officers demonstrates this point. Apart from rewarding the armed service faithful with lucrative government positions, Chavez has also ensured himself a tighter rein over the civilian government through his placement of military officers. Post has identified over 200 key positions, from ministers on down, as being filled by active or retired military personnel. We will continue to follow this military-to-civilian movement and what it means for Chavez's Venezuela. End Summary.

Extent of Military Influence

[1](#)2. (SBU) Post has previously reported on the inroads the military has made into civil society (reftel). In September 2005, the Organic Law of the National Armed Forces provided Chavez with broader powers over the military, and it greatly increased the armed forces' involvement in many non-traditional sectors. The expanded scope ranges from military provision of infrastructure for Chavez's popular "Missions" to participation in economic development and regional integration. Further padding the executive and legislative branches, appointed and elected military officials in turn fill their staffing needs by employing additional soldiers.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The heavy migration of military officers to the government has not gone without scrutiny. The military itself is concerned about the drain of leadership (refs), and it surprises no one that the value of these placements has

more to do with their access to state funds than in their actual job descriptions. Awkward placement of underqualified but high-ranking officers is also notable: Director of the secret police (DISIP) and active military Colonel Henry

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Rangel Silva was previously the director of the National Housing Council (Conavi); Vice Minister for Foreign Relations (and General) Alcides Rondon had occupied the post of Vice Minister for Citizen Safety, and before that, Vice Minister of Information and Communications; and ex-Minister of Defense and retired General Jorge Garcia Carneiro is now the current Minister of Social Development and Popular Participation. These pairings show that the key issue is not the officer's qualifications, but rather their commitment to Chavez and the "Bolivarian Revolution."

¶4. (SBU) Perhaps indicating a bit of sensitivity about the militarization of the BRV, increasingly, new appointees are announced without advertisement of their military backgrounds. The government gazettes opt to label new appointees as "Citizen X" rather than "General X" in an effort to downplay the new job recipients' origin. This, in addition to frequent cabinet shuffles and the scarcity of information provided to Post by the BRV, makes a precise count difficult to achieve. The public distinction between active and retired officials is equally obscure. However, Emboffs have identified 230 active and retired military officials serving in positions from the directorial to the ministerial level in the Venezuelan government.

¶5. (U) At last count, active duty or former military officers head 24% of BRV ministries (6 of 25), and 30% of vice ministry slots (6 of 20):

- Minister of Infrastructure - Col. Ramon Carrizalez
- Minister of Interior and Justice - Lt. Jesse Chacon
- Minister of Nutrition - Gen. Rafael Oropeza

CARACAS 00002682 002.3 OF 003

- Minister of Tourism - Gen. Wilmar Castro Soteldo
- Minister of Agriculture and Land - Elias Jaua Milano
- Minister of Social Development and Popular Participation - Gen. Jorge Luis Garcia Carneiro
- Vice Minister of Infrastructure - Gen. Alvaro Carrasco Roa
- Vice Minister of Nutrition - Gen. Rafael Coronado Patino
- Vice Minister of Finance - Capt. Edgar Hernandez Behrens
- Vice Minister of Regulation and Control - Gen. Alejandro Montes Estrada
- Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs - Gen. Alcides Rondon Rivero
- Vice Minister of Citizen Security (MIJ) - Gen. Jesus Villegas Solarte

¶6. (U) The governors of 39% of Venezuela's states (9 of 23) are current or former military officers:

- Carabobo - Gen. Luis Felipe Acosta Carlez
- Apure - Capt. Jesus Alberto Aguilarte Gamez
- Tachira - Capt. Ronald Jose Blanco La Cruz
- Miranda - Lt. Diosdado Cabello Rondon
- Merida - Capt. Florencio Antonio Porras Echezurria
- Bolivar - Gen. Francisco Jose Rangel Gomez
- Lara - Lt. Col. Luis Reyes Reyes
- Vargas - Maj. Antonio Rodriguez San Juan
- Cojedes - Lt. Col. Johnny Yanez

¶7. (U) The military's influence on civilian police and security is considerable:

- DISIP (secret police) - Col. Henry Rangel Silva
- Tachira State Police - Lt. Col. Heber Aguilar Sanchez
- Tachira State - Office of Security and Public Order - Col. Gabriel Colmenares Oviedo
- Anzoategui State Police - Maj. Robert Aranguren Mata
- Guarico State Police - Col. Artemio Boada

-- Barinas State Police - Lt. Col. Giuseppe Cacioppo Oliveri
-- Metropolitan (Caracas) Police - Brig. Gen. Jesus Figueroa Rodriguez
-- National Security and Defense Council - Gen. Melvin Lopez Hidalgo
-- Min. of the Interior and Justice (MIJ): Northeast and Island Police Academy - Col. Luis Marcano Meza
-- MIJ: Central and Llanos Region Police Academy - Jose Carlos Aure Lizausaba
-- MIJ: Inmate Custody and Rehabilitation - Lt. Col. Erling Rojas
-- MIJ: Citizen Security - Gen. Jesus Villegas Solarte

¶8. (U) Chavez has also dispatched active and retired military officials globally as ambassadors or consuls general:

-- To the UN - Lt. Col. Francisco Arias Cardenas
-- To the Dominican Republic - Gen. Francisco Belisario Landis
-- To Arauca, Colombia - Col. Raul Bolivar Blanco (CG)
-- To Chile - Col. Victor Delgado Morsalve
-- To Brazil - Gen. Julio Garcia Montoya
-- To Sao Paulo, Brazil - Gen. Jorge Duran Centeno (CG)
-- To Israel - Gen. Angel Machado Almeida
-- To China - Capt. Rocio Maneiro Gonzalez
-- To Malaysia - Gen. Noel Martinez Ochoa
-- To Spain - Brig. Gen. Arevalo Mendez Romero
-- To Frankfurt, Germany - Cesar Mendez Gonzalez (CG)
-- To Ecuador - Maj. Oscar Navas Tortolero
-- To Switzerland - V. Adm. Jorge Sierraalta Zavarce

¶9. (SBU) The remainder of the transplanted military officials identified by post hold directorial positions in areas as disparate as banking, disaster relief, television, drug policy, commerce, environment and even the Caracas metro system.

Comment

¶10. (C) The high numbers and broad reach of military officials in the BRV demonstrate that Chavez's regime is, at a profound level, a military regime. Due to BRV bureaucracy and a trend to disguise military officers' backgrounds, it may become more difficult for post to keep precise track of

CARACAS 00002682 003.3 OF 003

the constant influx of Chavez appointees, newly elected officials and other military incumbents. However, a broad view shows that the armed forces have found a comfortable position within the BRV and will continue to render influence to the extent Chavez determines.

WHITAKER